

WaterProtectionNetwork

On Watch for America's Waters

Protect and Restore Natural Infrastructure for People and Wildlife

America faces significant water resource challenges, driven in part by more intense coastal storms, more frequent and severe flooding, unprecedented droughts, and the unintended consequences from many already-constructed water resources projects. Natural infrastructure is a critical—but underused—tool for solving many of these challenges, while also protecting and improving the health of the nation's rivers, floodplains, wetlands, and shorelines.

To ensure that Corps of Engineers planning protects and restores natural infrastructure, Congress should:

- **Defend the Integrity of the Nation's Environmental Laws:** It is critically important that Congress defend the integrity of the nation's environmental laws, including the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Endangered Species Act. To protect the nation's natural infrastructure—healthy rivers, streams, floodplains, and shorelines—Congress should also engage in effective oversight to ensure that the Corps complies with both the letter and spirit of these laws when planning, constructing, and operating projects.
- **Mainstream Use of Natural Infrastructure:** Congress should ensure that Corps of Engineers' planning recognizes and utilizes natural infrastructure whenever possible to help communities avoid flood and storm damages. WRDA 2018 directed the Corps to consider the use of natural infrastructures whenever those solutions "are practicable." However, the Corps' new implementing guidance incorrectly concludes that this provision requires no changes at all in the way the Corps plans projects. The next WRDA should take further steps to mainstream natural infrastructure solutions within the Corps' planning and project selection process.
- **Modernize the Corps' Benefit-Cost Analysis Process:** Congress should ensure that the Corps properly accounts for both project costs and benefits when planning federal water resources projects—including by accounting for increased ecosystem services as a project benefit and lost ecosystem services as a project cost. Fully accounting for costs and benefits is critical for making effective decisions regarding planning, construction, budgeting, prioritization, and authorization of Corps projects.